

Ignacy Kornell

- Ignacy Kornell was born in Poland in 1886 or 1887.
- Along with his native Polish, he also spoke German and several other languages.
- His surname, Kornell, was Anglicized presumably when he immigrated to Canada, but he steadfastly retained his given name, Ignacy (sometimes spelled Ignatz).
- Ignacy formed a friendship with Olga Wilson and her husband, Claud Roland (Paddy), who operated a tourist lodge at Golden Arm for periods in the late 1940s and 1950s. He was delighted to learn that Mrs. Wilson spoke Polish and Ukrainian and often told her about his family.
- "He told me he was married in Poland, and had a son and two daughters," recalled Olga. "He wanted to bring his youngest daughter, Mary, to Red Lake, and have me teach her Canadian living and to speak English. I don't know why, but for some reason she never came over. I never knew what happened to Ignatz's other daughter and son, but he used to say he had three children," said Olga.
- "Ignacy wanted to come to Canada to make a better living, then bring his family over when he got on his feet and had enough money," continued Olga.
- In a bold move, Ignacy stole two horses from the army and sold them, then used the money he made from that to come to Canada.
- Canadian immigration records reveal that Ignacy Kornell arrived in Quebec on May 23rd, 1927 aboard the Canadian Pacific Line ship, the *S.S. Empress of Scotland*. He gave his age as 40, and his nationality as Polish.
- Ignacy had intentions to bring his wife and family over, as they could be accepted as "family" Canadian immigrants, however, when the Depression hit in 1930, that "family" doorway to immigration was shut and there was no way for him to bring his family to Canada. Kornell never saw his family again.
- Kornell likely came to Red Lake a short time later, in the late 1920s in wake of the gold rush.
- He was certainly on the scene in the 1930s. A trapper, firefighter, prospector and mine caretaker, he was a legendary figure at the west end of Red Lake, an area he called home long after its mining and residential boom of the 1930s subsided. It was where Kornell most often found work and where he felt most at home.
- He spent much of his Red Lake life living near Pipestone Bay, 25 miles away by water, or at his trapline near Starratt-Olsen.
- By the early 1930s, Kornell was comfortably installed in a sturdy log cabin, adorned with tarpaper painted white, on the left side of Pipestone Narrows.
- From that vantage point, he not only saw who was going to the Pipestone Bay area or returning from it, but also could see what weather conditions were approaching.
- Although Kornell's home was perched on a craggy point on one side of the narrows, he built it far enough back so as to be at least partially sheltered from ferocious winds which turn Pipestone Bay violent.
- In this setting, Kornell cleared and then for years cultivated a large vegetable garden which was surrounded by an expansive log fence. He gave freely of his garden produce.
- Kornell enjoyed people, had friends, and while he lived in relative isolation, he was no hermit. He was sociable, even loquacious.
- He occasionally took in prospectors as boarders or prospecting or trapping partners, and he was known to be generous.
- The late Dr. Daniel Revell, the first and only physician at the west end of Red Lake, met Kornell there in 1934. "He grew his own potatoes and shared some with us. Our daughter, Margaret, called him 'Iggy.' Like a lot of men living alone in the bush, Ignacy was lonesome and would talk for hours on end whenever we met. He always brought word of whether [Pipestone] Narrows was safe, as I often stayed on the ice or went through a portage to avoid unsafe ice," Revell reminisced.
- Revell smiled whenever he remembered any of Kornell's stories. A classic is best told in the former's own words: "In Red Lake, Ignacy purchased 'exclusive rights' on one of the women at a brothel, but he was sure she had 'cheated.' One evening, the police raided this particular brothel and several prominent Howey Gold Mines' staff were there. Ignacy was squatting against a wall and when asked by the police what he was doing there, replied in his thick accent, 'just listening to the raaawdyio [radio].'"

- Kornell prospected and staked many mining claims in the Red Lake District, his most prominent being the "Kornell Group" north of Martin Bay.
- He prospected extensively in the Pipestone Bay area, as well as around Madsen. While he did undertake some development work, the claims never produced.
- Kornell had great physical strength and endurance, traits which were appreciated by the Ontario Forestry Branch at Red Lake.
- In the 1930s, he was hired periodically on bush firefighting crews.
- Other than prospecting and firefighting, Kornell earned his living by trapping extensively, and by working as a caretaker of dormant or temporarily-closed substantial mining properties at the west end of Red Lake.
- For many years, he routinely patrolled and exerted a razor-sharp gaze over the Lake Rowan and Cole Gold Mines and their equipment and cabins.
- Louise Stanley, a telephone switchboard operator in Red Lake in the 1940s, found Kornell stubbornly unyielding to the technology of the day. At that time, he was caretaker of the Lake Rowan Gold Mines property at the west end of Red Lake. Using a Hydro telephone on a pole, Kornell called the switchboard to connect to the mine office so that its employees could bring him supplies. Stanley remembered:

One day, all these untoward sputtering on the line told me that Ignacy had the receiver off its hook. It was causing a complete ground on the line, so I plugged in.

'Is that you, Ignacy?' I said.

He replied, 'Yah, yah, I'm ringing Lake Rowan Mine,' as much as to say, 'what are you sticking your nose in for?'

I knew I was in for the usual argument, but told him to hang up and I would put the call in.

'Yah, Yah, I do,' Ignacy replied, but he did not do. He had a chap muttering away to him, and my switchboard was far too busy to waste time on him.

At last, I said, 'If you do not hang up, Ignacy, I'll leave you hanging on that line until you freeze.' It was actually 40 below. 'Now, hang up!' I said.

He did so very grudgingly, muttering to his friend, 'Yeesus Christ, she can see clear to Pipestone!'

Ever afterward, when we would meet on the street in Red Lake, Ignacy would shy off to the edge as if I was going to put a hex on him.

- Kornell had a trapline and two cabins between Medicine Stone and Tack Lakes, and stayed there occasionally.
- In June 1959, on one of those visits, Kornell found the cabin cold when he returned from the trapline. He placed kindling and paper in the stove and was about to pick up wood when he suffered a stroke. Kornell had fallen by his door, but could not reach its handle.
- After considerable time on a cold, rough floor, he was found by Leonard Euler and James Seidel, who happened to come for a visit. They transported Kornell to the Red Cross Memorial Hospital in Red Lake.
- The stroke caused severe damage and he died about one week later.
- He was buried in Red Lake Cemetery under tall jack pine and near the graves of his friends Agnes and Thomas McVeigh.
- The Municipality sold Kornell's cabins, canoe, traps and effects to a summer visitor, Norman Johnson, of Wisconsin.
- Kornell used to muse, "Maybe someday I'll sleep on a good pillow." Ironically, that only occurred during his last week of life in hospital.